

# Commemorating the International Day of Peace

A working manual

Kabarole Research &  
Resource Centre,

A 2007 Edition

BUSIINGE Christopher  
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IDP COMMEMORATION-KRC MANUAL-2007

<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PROLOGUE</b>	<b>4</b>
WHY UGANDANS HAVE CHOSEN TO COMMEMORATE THIS DAY?	6
<b>IS THERE ANY VALUE ADDITION OF THE IDP COMMEMORATION INTO ADDRESSING CONFLICTS IN UGANDA?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>THE PROCESS</b>	<b>8</b>
THE PEACE WEEK	8
<i>The Night vigil,</i>	9
PREPARATION AND TIME	10
THE GRAND DAY, SEPTEMBER 21	10
<b>FINANCING THE PEACE DAY</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>DOES AND DON'TS</b>	<b>11</b>
ANNEX	12
CHECKLIST I	12
ANNEX II-RESOLUTION 55/282	14
ANNEX III-BACKGROUND TO IDP SEPTEMBER 21	15
<b>REFERENCES;</b>	<b>16</b>

## Acronyms

KRC	Kabarole Research & Resource Centre
UN	United Nations
IDP	International Day of Peace
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
GA	General Assembly

## **Introduction**

When the government of Costa Rica sponsored resolution (GA 36/67) at the UN general assembly in 1981, little did they know that this day would later have overwhelming impact onto the lives of people in the Rwenzori and Uganda in general. This was later passed by General assembly under resolution 55/282 in 2001. In Uganda, this day was not widely known until when the civil society organizations started to promote the day in Fort Portal in the year 2002. Since then, people have come from all walks of life to commemorate the day as a way to reflect on tribal, land conflicts and armed conflicts in the Rwenzori region and Northern Uganda. For the civil society organizations, the day is not a mere celebration where people gather to eat, drink and dance for fun but a day when people reflect on the impact of conflicts and thinking of solutions how to overcome them together with their leaders. For this to happen, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre has been at the helm of mobilizing people, civil societies, local leaders and government officials to give due consideration for this reflection to happen.

## **Prologue**

On September 21<sup>st</sup> 2002, I was just a month old at KRC, and found that plans were already underway to commemorate the international day of peace in the Rwenzori region and the venue chosen was Boma grounds. I also learnt that people/participants were coming from all walks of life in the Rwenzori region as well as Northern Uganda. I remember enjoying watching the Rara-Raka dance by a cultural group from Gulu, and that was my first time to be a part of a live performance and the other times I watched them on television. At that time, the Rwenzori region was infested and affected by the ADF insurgency that had displaced over 800,000 people into internally displaced camps and many of whom were struggling to return to their homes while many others had suffered maims and torture. This day was used to call up on the ADF rebels to apply for amnesty and be forgiven and re-integrated in the community.

The day was presided over by then German ambassador, Haulder Barm and the Chairman of amnesty commission Justice Onega. Being my first time to take part in such an exciting event and seeing many cultural performances, it did not occur to me that through these performances important transformations would take place to change people's attitudes and prejudices that often are source of conflict. I later learnt that the process provided an opportunity to learn about each others cultures and aspirations of different groups of people and that separation based on prejudices and attitudes had kept us so far a part from each other and so we some times cared less about other people like those in Northern Uganda and those neighboring us. It also meant that, their conflicts are not our conflicts but through this gathering this seems to be changing and people care more than before. That is the transformation that occurred to me and since then; the commemoration of the IDP has become an important function to me and many other peoples in Rwenzori and Uganda in general. These reflections and movement for the IDP has since spread from the small town of Fort Portal to the Northern, Eastern, Central and West Nile Regions in quest for peace. These movements have brought on board peace mongers like Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu diocese, Retired Bishop Ochola and government officials to the level of the minister of Defense, Dr. Crispus Kiyonga during the 2007 commemoration.

Since 2002, I have actively participated in the commemoration of this day and it is out of this experience that I have chosen to put down notes that would assist any individual, organization and government who wish to organize the commemoration of this day. I have been to Fort Portal IDP of 2002, Kibaale in 2003, Gulu in 2004, Soroti in 2005, back to Kibaale and Kampala in 2006 and Kasese in 2007. It is after the commemoration of the Kasese IDP that an idea came to mind that I should document this process with the hope that it will be referred to by other individuals, group and governments who wish to commemorate the IDP.

For the pessimists, they will argue that the IDP is a money minting event and consumes a lot of time. These people reserve a right to their opinion; however, I would

prefer that they look deeper into the history of Uganda and how much this activity seeks for the re-discovery of our traditional norms as African people to resolve conflicts peacefully without recourse to violence. I have also chosen to start working on this document when it is the 45th Independence Day for the republic of Uganda. It is on this day that every Ugandan is reminded of British colonial legacy that left both a positive and negative impact onto the many lives of Ugandans and Africans in general. It is on this day that we are reminded that 31% of Ugandans are below the poverty line and live on less than a dollar a day and that our mother land Uganda is not yet economically independent with much of her budget support from external donations rather than our own. It is also common knowledge that conflict in the Ugandan context is synonymous with the poverty levels among many Ugandans as is the case for the people who are affected by conflict in northern Uganda where poverty levels are over 60%. For some of the groups they feel marginalized and they have chosen the violent methods in order to be heard which has instead further worsened the situation and further left many Ugandans in abject poverty.

**Why Ugandans have chosen to commemorate this day?**

There are many reasons why Ugandans have chosen to commemorate the international day of peace yet the government of Uganda has not. Many Ugandans have faced and suffered many types of conflicts, some of which have left glaring scars onto the Ugandan economy. The second reason is that, many Ugandans do not subscribe to violent means of resolving conflicts and this is signified by the rich cultural norms that promote reconciliation and harmonious coexistence across most ethnic groups. There is no doubt that today the government is convinced about using dialogue to talk to her “enemies” rather than fighting.

**Is there any value addition of the IDP commemoration into addressing conflicts in Uganda?**

There are many good things that have come through the commemoration of the IDP in Uganda.

- ✚ It has given us the opportunity to reflect on the individual self, our anger and also further reflection into the inside of our so called enemy. We are reminded that conflicts that affect us are not of our own making. We have also learnt that we need to separate conflicts from individuals who are suffering from it. For instance, the conglomeration of people from different tribal groups has given the opportunity to learn about each others ways of life and taken away the prejudice that for a long time separated them. There has been an intra and extra exchange of peoples into communities where they have never been. I know for sure if some one asked a resident of the Rwenzori before they got the opportunity to interact with those in the North, about what they think of the conflict in Northern Uganda, they would say that that is a conflict for the Acholi people and not our business. Today it is not the case, many of them have come to learn and can sympathize and be empathetic with the victims of the conflict in Northern Ugandan. The IDP has given an opportunity for tribal groups to analyze and think outside the box.
  
- ✚ Today there is a very big peace movement in the region that is sensitized and knows that every 21<sup>st</sup> of September each year is a day for reflection over conflict issues in their homes and communities-children and students can testify to this. These people have often taken advantage of this day to advocate and appeal to government to resolve conflict peacefully. I remember the 2004 peace day in Gulu did emphasize the position of civil society and appealed to government to resolve the northern Uganda conflict peacefully. It is on this day that government has often taken advantage of the opportunity to communicate to the people about development policies.
  
- ✚ This day has acted therapeutically to those who have suffered conflict and have been traumatized by many conflict events. Many of those who have been maimed by conflict have been given an opportunity to smile when a traditional dance group entertains the guests with their favorite traditional performance. Sometimes this has come through a dramatic performance. Many people can smile after along time of suffering for at least one day.

✚ Mobilized local, national and international leaders to reflect on repercussions of conflict. Often times, these leaders are not in touch with the local problems and often prefer looking for solutions to local problems in big hotels like Hotel Africana, Serena and others. The commemoration of the IDP has found a simplified and amplified manner through which leaders have been tasked to respond to challenges through music, drama and poems. To this, the leaders have been invited to the community where the problems are and can immediately respond to concerns raised through a variety of media.

## **The Process**

I must say it is not easy to prepare and successfully commemorate the international day of peace. Tradition has dictated that a peace week in Uganda precedes September 21, the UN-designated day. First it is very important that the day is commemorated on this day because theoretically, on this day the world is silent, no gun shots, no shouting but listening. It also means that people, governments, the media can pick up and take very seriously what has been said on this day. It is technically and strategically correct to time this day for commemoration in order to convey the message to wider public. Otherwise, each community depending on circumstance could chose to commemorate the day on any other day as will be chosen by the locals.

### **The peace week**

It is usually a good idea that many people, groups, governments can come together and reflect on the situation in their locality, what they want do and the message they want to communicate to the wider public on a given situation. It is during the peace week that each individual, organization decides to take part in different activities that will facilitate them to reflect on different situations within the local context. During the peace week, every one comes together and decides on what to do depending on the local context. The essence of the peace week is to provide wider space and time for reflection. It is important that prior to the commemoration of the peace day and deciding on the activities for the peace week a local theme and objective must be agreed on by the members. That will help on the activities that need to be designed for

the peace week. The theme for the peace week must remain in line with the global theme in order to reflect on both local and international challenges of our time.

The Night vigil,

Now the night vigil on September 20<sup>th</sup> is a very important day and it precedes September 21. It is now tradition that every September 20, the day is used as a day for reflection around a bonfire. The Acholi call it Wang-oo. It is on this Wang-oo that the elders will tell stories of the past, and how conflicts would be resolved. Traditional dance groups are also invited to attend and entertain the participants at the Wang-oo. Usually a bull is roasted and shared among the participants of the Wang-oo. It is a very important night, that those who once harbored prejudices against one another group will on that night each eat the roasted meat and drink together. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that the Wang-oo will create bonds among those people who once thought that they would never talk or eat together.

It is also important to note that, Wangoos in Africa mean something very important, they symbolize peoples determination to live on, defiance against the things that threaten life. In the old African setting before these traditions were antagonized, fire side stories enhanced harmony, continuity and prayers for long life. Whenever a person died, a fire was set in the middle of the compound to defy the spirits of death.

In church candles are set around the Altar to symbolize God's presence. For example, in the days of Moses in the bible, a fire symbolized the presence of God: before Moses in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament God wanted to send them, on a mission to save his people from evil. The burning bush and Lightning was the sign of the presence of God

It is these values that the night vigil-or Wangoo seeks to facilitate people to reflect on. If the community wishes, a prayer can also be said by religious leaders to re-enforce the message in the context of conflict.

## Preparation and time

The peace week can be used to mobilize the general public for the grand day that is September 21. Activities like radio talk shows are an important opportunity for this mobilization. The best time to start to preparation for the peace day is 3 months in advance because it can be very intensive. Advance preparation will enable send out invitations to very busy people like government officials who are very important to take part in the activity.

## The grand day, September 21

Experience has taught us that, one needs to survey the venue for the grand day commemoration. Some times, the venue could be chosen based on the conflict/or the negative effects of conflict like a mass massacre or any other reason as will be chosen by the organizers. While choosing the venue for the grand day, it is very important to involve other stakeholders beyond the organizing committee particularly the locals where the day will be commemorated. It is a good idea that the local committee constitutes more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members for the venue committee. The reason is very simple; the locals usually understand the local context very well and know the does and don'ts of the area. The other reason why you must have local members on the venue committee is that, you don't wish that any conflicts emerges that could disorganize the day. Otherwise it becomes a sad moment for every one instead of bringing some joy to people who have suffered conflict.

## **Financing the peace day**

Usually finances have come from members who wish to commemorate the day. It is important to keep the event less expensive in order to allow members to contribute to the event. Local resources should be targeted and that way it should help own and contribute to the call for the peace building in the area. Financing should not override the intent for the commemoration of the peace day. We need to provide space for the natural emergence of a peace movement in our locality and that should be reason

enough not to look at outsiders to provide the funds. Internal financial mobilization will ensure commitment, peer accountability for the usage of funds for the event.

## **Does and don'ts**

- ✚ If you are from outside the area, involve the locals in organizing the event-your job is help facilitate the processes if it is there first time to organize it.
- ✚ Keep it simple and not expensive- if the members are committed they should be willing to sacrifice and commit any available resources rather than making the activity a money making event.
- ✚ Ensure that the organizing committee is made up of individuals who will ensure transparency and accountability of the resources mobilized for the commemoration.
- ✚ Ensure team work for a successful event-usually this is difficult and may become a source of frustration on the part of the members but members find amicable ways to over come the frustration.
- ✚ Prepare and send out invitations in advance especially when you are targeting busy people like government officials.
- ✚ Music, dance and drama have throughout these years been used as a media to communicate. So local drama groups and some from other areas can be invited to attend depending on the reasons and resources available.
- ✚ If you are organizing the peace day for the first time, you may wish to consult with those who have experience in organizing it even if you have the manual. This could help to take care of other small things that could not be documented in the manual.

## Annex

## Checklist I

For any peace day commemoration to be successfully organized, the organizing committee needs to prepare a checklist of items they would like to fulfill and below are a few generic items that have been drawn from experience.

Item	Tick when done (✓)
Prepare and send out invitation letters at least a month in advance especially for very busy people like government officials who a must to attend.	
Start 3 months to plan for the day to avoid any eventualities	
Fundraising started 3 months ago before the event	
Theme and venue agreed upon 2 months (by July) before commemoration	
Have all stakeholders been contacted and involved for planning and taking part in the commemoration including local governments?	
The theme for the day has been sent out to cultural and drama groups for preparation	
All the necessary working committees are in place and have been given assignments to fulfill and they are not idle.	
Has the venue been surveyed, and all questions about the venue have been answered? And do we have a venue committee in place? Is it is resourced?	
Have the interests of different conflicting parties been taken care of?	
Do some sections of the community think that the organizing committee will not necessarily represent the interests of all people who are victims of conflict? How much is the organizing committee aware of these facts and has it been able to address them?	
Is there any one in charge of the media to communicate the message of	

the day? Has the media been contacted any way?	
Is there a prepared statement that clearly articulates the message that needs to be conveyed to the representatives of government and other stakeholders?	
Are the objectives of the commemoration clear and can they be articulated by the participating members?	
<b>Any other?????.....think broadly</b>	

Annex II-Resolution 55/282

## **Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 55/282. International Day of Peace**

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 36/67 of 30 November 1981, by which it declared that the third Tuesday of September, the opening day of the regular sessions of the General Assembly, shall be officially proclaimed and observed as International Day of Peace and shall be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples,

Recalling also its other relevant resolutions, including resolution 55/14 of 3 November 2000,

Reaffirming the contribution that the observance and celebration of the International Day of Peace makes in strengthening the ideals of peace and alleviating tensions and causes of conflict,

Considering the unique opportunity it offers for a cessation of violence and conflict throughout the world, and the related importance of achieving the broadest possible awareness and observance of the International Day of Peace among the global community,

Desiring to draw attention to the objectives of the International Day of Peace, and therefore to fix a date for its observance each year that is separate from the opening day of the regular sessions of the General Assembly,

1. Decides that, with effect from the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, the International Day of Peace shall be observed on 21 September each year, with this date to be brought to the attention of all people for the celebration and observance of peace;

2. Declares that the International Day of Peace shall henceforth be observed as a day of global ceasefire and non-violence, an invitation to all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Day;

3. Invites all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, regional and non-governmental organizations and individuals to commemorate, in an appropriate manner, the International Day of Peace, including through education and public awareness, and to cooperate with the United Nations in the establishment of the global ceasefire.

111th plenary meeting 7 September 2001

### **Annex III-Background to IDP September 21**

The International Day of Peace was established by a United Nations resolution in 1981 to coincide with the opening of the General Assembly, was first inaugurated on the third Tuesday of September, 1982. Beginning on this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the UN General Assembly has set **21 September** as the now permanent date for the International Day of Peace.

In establishing the International Day of Peace, the United Nations General Assembly decided that it would be appropriate "to devote a specific time to concentrate the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States, as well as of the whole of mankind, to promoting the ideals of peace and to giving positive evidence of their commitment to peace in all viable ways... (The International Day of Peace) should be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples."

The Assembly's resolution declared that the International Day of Peace "will serve as a reminder to all peoples that our Organization, with all its limitations, is a living instrument in the service of peace and should serve all of us here within the Organization as a constantly pealing bell reminding us that our permanent commitment, above all interests or differences of any kind, is to peace. May this Peace Day indeed be a day of peace." (Quotes excerpted from the United Nations General Assembly Resolution UN/A/RES/36/67.)

(Quote from the amending UN resolution UN/A/RES/55/282 which fixes the date of the International Day of Peace on 21 September):

"The Assembly, reaffirming the contribution that the observance and celebration of the International Day of Peace make in strengthening the ideals of peace and alleviating tensions and causes of conflict, (decided that) beginning with the fifty-seventh session, the Day should be observed on 21 September each year, with this date to be brought to the attention of all people for the celebration and observance of peace."

## References;

- (1) 2007 Kasese district peace day concept paper prepared by the civil society peace movement in the Rwenzori region of which KRC is a member as well as the 2006 concept paper for the peace day in Kibaale district.
- (2) KRC September 2007 E-news letter available on the KRC website: [www.krc.or.ug](http://www.krc.or.ug) and resource centre.
- (3) Peace week activity reports, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 all available
- (4) Reference is also made to; [www.bridgepeace.org](http://www.bridgepeace.org) and <http://www.idpvigil.com/>
- (5) [www.pathwaystopace.org](http://www.pathwaystopace.org)
- (6)